



Ecology of Teaching Academic Writing: A case study of the Effect of Metadiscourse Markers Instruction on Intermediate EFL Learners' Narrative vs. Descriptive Writing

Akademik Yazı Öğretim Ekolojisi: Üst Söylem Belirteçlerinin Öğretiminin Orta Düzey Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrenenlerin Anlatımsal ve Betimsel Yazılarına Etkisi Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması

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Abstract

The current study aims at investigating the effect of instruction of metadiscourse on Iranians EFL learners' descriptive and narrative writings in an ecological way that combines explicit and implicit techniques. To this end, initially an Oxford Proficiency Test was administered to 80 female and male self-motivated learners who were registered in an academic writing course in a private language school in Tehran, Iran. Then, 42 out of 80 EFL learners were randomly selected and divided into two equal groups as an experimental and a control group. The term 'ecological' meant that methods, materials and setting of the study approximated as far as possible to the real-world. The experimental group received the metadiscourse instruction both on narrative writing and metadiscourse instruction on descriptive writing. The treatment which was brimming with teaching metadiscourse markers was given in 12 sequential sessions about 30 minutes. They were introduced in the beginning stages of each session during teacher speech, and a similar routine was maintained over a period of six weeks. Writing of students was observed in a portfolio and a final score was decided for each student writing based on the teacher's observation and student portfolio. To investigate the means of two groups' performance on final scores, an independent sample t-test was employed. The findings revealed that metadiscourse instruction did have a statistically significant effect on these intermediate EFL learners' performance on narrative writing. The results indicated that the descriptive writing performance of the participants was also improved once they were taught via metadiscourse instruction. Furthermore, the analysis of the data revealed that after the metadiscourse instruction, in terms of narrative writings, the experimental group utilized interactional metadiscourses more than interactive metadiscourse. In contrast, concerning the descriptive writing, the learners used interactive metadiscourses more than interactional metadiscourses.

Keywords: Metadiscourse Instruction; Descriptive Writing; Narrative Writing; Iranian EFL Learners.

Öz

Bu çalışma, üst söylem belirteçlerinin öğretiminin İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen İranlı öğrencilerinin tanımlayıcı ve anlatı yazıları üzerindeki etkisini açık ve örtük teknikleri birleştiren ekolojik bir şekilde araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, İran'ın Tahran şehrinde özel bir dil okulunda akademik yazma kursuna kayıtlı 80 kadın ve erkek, kendi kendini motive eden öğrenciye başlangıçta bir Oxford Yeterlilik Testi uygulanmıştır. Daha sonra, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen 80 öğrenciden 42'si rastgele seçildi ve deney ve kontrol grubu olarak iki eşit gruba ayrıldı. 'Ekolojik' terimi, çalışmanın yöntemleri, materyalleri ve ortamının gerçek dünyaya olabildiğince yakın olması anlamına geliyordu. Deney grubuna hem anlatımsal yazma, hem de betimleyici yazma ile ilgili üstsöylem belirteçlerine yönelik eğitim verilmiştir. Üstsöylem belirteçlerinin öğretimi yaklaşık 30 dakika içinde 12 ardışık seansta verildi. Belirteçler her oturumun başlangıç aşamalarında tanıtıldı ve altı haftalık bir süre boyunca benzer bir rutin korundu. Öğrencilerin yazıları bir portföyde gözlemlendi ve her öğrencinin yazma notuna öğretmenin gözlemine ve öğrenci portföyüne göre bir

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karar verildi. İki grubun final puanları üzerindeki performansının ortalamalarını araştırmak için bağımsız bir örneklem t-testi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, üst söylem belirteçlerinin öğretiminin orta düzey İngilizce bilgisine sahip öğrencilerin anlatımsal yazma performansını üzerinde istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir etkisi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların betimsel yazma performansının üst söylem belirteçlerini öğretildikten sonra da iyileştiğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca, verilerin analizi, üst söylem belirteçlerinin öğretiminden sonra, anlatımsal yazılar açısından, deneysel grubun interaktif üst söylemden daha fazla etkileşimli üst söylem kullandığını ortaya koymuştur. Buna karşın, betimsel yazımla ilgili olarak, öğrenciler etkileşimli üst söylemi interaktif üst söylemden daha fazla kullandılar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üst söylem belirteçlerinin öğretimi, tanımlayıcı yazı, anlatı yazı; İnanlı İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenenler

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1. Introduction

Teaching L2 writing is perhaps a more complex process than other skills as creating a text is an interactive link between the reader and the writer without seeing/knowing them, and thus according to Dağdeviren Kirmizi (2018), prone to various taxonomies of errors. Unlike in early heydays of communicative language teaching, writing is now given a key role in the curriculum as it is associated with academia, creativity, and pragmatic needs (French and Rhoder, 1992). Further, according to Brown (2004), learning to write is so different from learning to speak, which can be acquired rather automatically or subconsciously. Learning to write is thus considered to be more difficult and intentional than learning to speak. It requires an ecological approach, which means that students should receive more balanced and focused (on their needs) instructional techniques, to keep engaged or interested in practicing writing. Since writing is a complex process which involves a range of skills and tasks because by writing students have constant opportunities to write and to utilize the writing procedures, each of which requires more emphasis on perhaps not just pre-determined particular tasks but tasks and activities that they can or enjoy doing, whether the focus is explicit or implicit.

Among different kinds of writing, and particularly in the local context of this research, narrative and descriptive writing are considered important writing genres in academia. Narrative is defined as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred" (Labov, 1972, p.360, cited in Ying, 2011). Using narrative, people retell their experiences to inform others. Narrative writing relates a clear sequence of events that occurs over time. Descriptive writing seems to be the second most popular writing genre in university. Descriptive writing is about how to describe oneself and surrounding. We know that teaching of English to the beginners should require those techniques which help them to make English more exciting. Descriptive writing is also important in making the writer use details to paint a picture with words. This process maintains interests of audience while describing people, places, things, and phenomena through the use of details.

Teachers have employed various methods to improve EFL learners' writing skills. Although they may not be aware of the term itself, the students also generally feel that teaching 'metadiscourse' can make writing more concrete and thus a useful technique to develop learners. For example, one of the major characteristics of a written text is its coherence. Based on Hyland's (2005) model, coherence is mainly achieved by means of metadiscourse markers. Apart from helping to produce a coherent and organized text, employing metadiscourse markers helps writers express their attitudes toward the text and persuade the readers towards their intended meanings.

A shorthand definition of metadiscourse is 'text about text' or the discourse about the evolving discourse, or the writer's explicit commentary on his/her own ongoing text (Bondi, 1999, p.1). In this sense, it includes items that point out the text itself as text or as language. In a wider sense, metadiscourse markers are linguistic items that show the writer's and reader's presence in the text (Stubbs, 1996). In a more definitive manner, according to Crismore (1989), metadiscourse assists a writer to guide, direct, and inform his/her readers about how he/she hopes he/she will respond to its content and is an important category both in creating and reading a text. Hyland (1998) highlights the importance of metadiscourse in researching composition, reading and text structure and so indeed it is examined it from a broad range of viewpoints in linguistics, for instance in contrastive studies (Markkanen, 1993), historical stylistic change (Taavitsainen, 2000), pragmatics (Verschueren, 1999), and genre studies, such as in Bäcklund (1998, pp. 141-157) and Bondi (1999, p.1-37).

Donovan (2001) highlight that it is imperative for students to learn writing for a wide variety of purposes. This can decrease writing apprehension, increase performance on state testing, and prepare students for writing in college, and for citizenship in a democracy. Thus, narrative writing should not be the prevailing genre at the expense of other writing genres (Wollman-Bonilla, 2004). If one genre is paramount for classroom, it can be descriptive writing, as Brown (2004) argues for its value of inspiring imagination. Reading a descriptive text, we automatically begin to pay attention to details and refine our perception about things. Probably the most important advantage of descriptive writing is allowing the reader to visualize what is being described. Thus, in the present study, narrative vs. descriptive writing is studied in view of the effect of metadiscourse markers instruction.

2. Review of literature

Considering the importance of metadiscourse, many researchers have investigated the different features of metadiscourse markers in L2 learners' compositions (Chen, 2006; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Field & Yip, 1992; Fung, 2011; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Rezvani, Abdullah, & Baki, 2012). Moreover, the findings of these studies revealed various results based on their aims; they confirmed the facilitative role of metadiscourse factors in the L2 writing performance. VandeKopple (1985) examined the interpersonal metadiscourse classifications in the discussion section of various articles published in English selected from a number of journals in social and natural sciences. He examined the interpersonal metadiscourse classifications of hedges, emphatics, and attitude markers. A significant finding was that writers used emphatics not to demonstrate arrogance, but to show their limitations and humility. These writers used hedges to discuss their results and what the results indicated and implied. He also concluded that emphatics were used almost as often as hedges; he studied the most normally used of the three types of interpersonal metadiscourse. Marandi (2003) examined similarly the use of metadiscourse in the overview/discussion sections of postgraduate theses submitted from 1990 onward by Persian/English-speaking postgraduate students. She concluded that textual metadiscourse sub-types were applied meaningfully more in the overviews but that social metadiscourse sub-types were utilized more in the discussion sections. Additionally, the results showed that the native speakers of Persian have mostly utilized textual/logical connectors while the use of them amongst the native speakers of English was at minimum.

Azizi (2001), following a model of metadiscourse teaching adapted from Crismore et al. (1993), looked at the use of social and textual metadiscourse in the English and Persian writings of Iranian university students. According to Azizi, English language learning experience of these participants and their awareness of rhetorical preferences of the foreign language bound them to produce more social markers while writing in English. Therefore, their English learning perhaps influence their English thinking process and so helped them to create a second identity whereas writing in a second language.

Beighmohammadi (2003) studied the extent to which the application of intensity markers is different across three areas of the hard/social sciences and the TEFL. Beighmohammadi found out that social science authors seem to have used twice as many intensity markers as writers majoring in hard sciences. The performance of TEFL writers was comparable to that of hard science writers. He explained that such a difference can be due to dependence of social science writers on discursive and rhetorical strategies in offering their results rather than simply depending on facts reporting.

To study the impact of metadiscourse knowledge and use on student writing, Simin (2004) examined the metadiscourse used in the writing of ninety undergraduate Iranian EFL learners. By using VandeKopple's (1985) model, their sample essays, written on argumentative topics allocated to them, were collected and analyzed. The results revealed that Proficiency level influenced the use of metadiscourse; proficient learners, used metadiscourse in their writing. Students of all three proficiency groups applied both textual and social metadiscourse in their argumentative writing. The upper-intermediate group applied far more metadiscourse than the intermediate and lower-intermediate groups.

Abdollahzadeh (2003) conducted a study based on a distinction between Iranian and English academic writers in their use of social metadiscourse and its related sub-categories in the discussion and assumption sections of papers published in ELT. Using a model from VandeKopple (2002), his purpose was to find the extent to which academic writers project themselves into texts to emphasize their personal involvement and how they complete this projecting. Sixty-five articles were selected randomly for the study, where half were written by English native speakers and half written by Iranian academics writing in English (32 vs. 33 articles). This pool of articles was drawn from publications during the years 2000-2002 in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). The focus of research was on studying hedges, as well as emphatics/attitude markers as it was supposed that the discussion and conclusion sections have a greater opportunity of using social metadiscourse and author projection in them. Their results reveal a significant difference between native vs. non-native writers' use of social metadiscourse markers. For example, Anglo-American writers used the highest number of social metadiscourse (56%), while no significant difference was found in their use of hedges despite its higher use in Iranian academics (65%). In contrast, more confidence and attitude markers were applied in the writings of Anglo-Americans than the Iranian academics.

Abdollahzadeh (2001) also surveyed the use of textual metadiscourse in the starting overview sections of papers written by Iranian and Anglo-American academics. He found that the native Anglo-American writers used meaningfully more textual metadiscourse (54%) than their Iranian academic counterparts (46%). Therefore, native Anglo-American writers and Iranian academic counterparts used more text connectives than code glosses and more code glosses than illocution markers. A few more text connectors were used by non-native writers more than the native writers. Native writers also used more code glosses and illocution markers.

Simin and Tavangar (2009) investigated EFL learners' writing performance based on the application of metadiscourse markers. The results showed that proficient learners made use of metadiscourse markers more than others. It also showed that the instruction of metadiscourse markers made a difference to the writing with the benefit of correct metadiscourse use. More recently, Fatahipour (2017) has also found that in a similar context, both teachers and students

act as stakeholders of academic writing and pay special attention to its markers explicitly or implicitly. The most recent studies on metadiscourse focused on certain types of metadiscourse markers such as 'interactional' rather than other types (Ahmadi, 2016; Hyland, 2018; Abbaszade, Hosseini and Aghajani, 2019; Azarieni, et al., 2019). Other studies focused on more advanced levels to find more discourse markers in writing (i.e. Bax, Nakatsuhara & Waller, 2019).

3. Objective of the Study

Writing is one of the main skills in learning English. In the modern world, there is an increasing demand for communicating knowledge, thoughts and ideas, so one of the means for this end is writing, especially writing in English which is an international language. Language learners need to develop their skills in writing which is considered as a productive skill.

One of the methods which can help improving learners' writing is metadiscourse instruction. By use of metadiscourse markers, writers can produce a coherent and organized text and express their attitudes toward the text and persuade the readers to their intended meanings. Tse (2004) considers metadiscourse to be vital at academic levels of writing because it reveals writers' intention to offer and discuss propositional information in both meaningful and appropriate manner to a specific community in a discipline. Therefore, proper instruction of the metadiscourse markers in writing can help learners improve their writings. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned issues, the main objective of the present study is to investigate and indicate the effect of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on EFL learners' writing in general and writing descriptive and narrative texts in particular. It also seeks to highlight the importance of narrative and descriptive writing as two important genres in the process of developing writing skill.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this paper the following questions are addressed:

RQ1: Does metadiscourse instruction have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing performance?

RQ2: Does metadiscourse instruction have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' descriptive writing performance?

Based on the above-mentioned research questions the following research hypotheses were posited.

H01: Metadiscourse instruction does not have significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing performance.

H02: Metadiscourse instruction does not have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' descriptive writing performance.

5 Theoretical Framework

Metadiscourse is an important and new concept in the study of composition, reading and text structure. Particularly, it is important at advanced levels of academic writing as it represents writers' endeavor to express and re-negotiate propositional data so that they are meaningful and suitable to specific disciplines (Hyland, 2005). The common thread in defining metadiscourse is that it applies to meanings other than propositional ones. In the same way, VandeKopple (1985, p.23) explains that although metadiscourse may not join propositional meaning, it still signals the voice of the author. According to Williams (1981), metadiscourse is discourse to direct readers rather than inform them. It contains linguistic elements, not related to aspects of external reality but related to the organization of the discourse itself and features of the relationship developing between the author and the reader. Definition that VandeKopple introduced as referential meaning is comparable with what Halliday (1978) calls, ideational meaning. Using the broad definition of metadiscourse, VandeKopple (1985) believes that it conveys interpersonal and/or textual meanings. Using Interpersonal metadiscourse, the writers can convey their personality traits, assessments and ideas towards an idea. They can show their selected role in the communication situation, and specify how they expect readers react to the material. Using textual metadiscourse also allows the writers to connect ideas within a text and make the sense of the text in a specific situation for their readers. According to Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen (1993), from the teaching composition perspective, interpersonal and textual functions are important to refer to linguistic items that clearly help the interpersonal/textual functions of language.

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

This research project was carried out in a private English institute in Tehran. The institute had elementary, intermediate and advanced levels language classes. In doing so, before conducting an Oxford Placement Test (OPT), it was expected to select those whose score would fall between one standard deviation (+1 SD) above the mean and one standard deviation (-1 SD) below the mean as the cut-off criterion. As a result, administering an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and based on the results of the OPT, 42 out of 80 Iranian EFL learners from six language classes at a private language institute in Tehran, Iran, were randomly selected as the main participants of the current study. The age of learners ranged between 14-18 years old. All the participants were supposed to take a pretest and posttest. In addition, participants' gender was not considered as a variable in this study and it was selected as the availability of sample dictates. Then, the selected participants were equally divided into two groups, (N=21), using the institutional support. All the participants have attended English class for five consecutive terms in the institutes.

6.2. Instruments

To collect the required data, the following instruments were utilized in this study: the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used in order to set-off the level of general language proficiency of the participants at the beginning of the study, and to select a homogenous sample. To ensure its reliability, using the KR-21 formula, the internal reliability of the test was calculated and reported to be .76, which was fairly satisfactory. In addition to OPT, a standard pretest was utilized as the other required instrument in this research to investigate the participants' initial knowledge of metadiscourse markers. Its purpose was to determine whether participants were sufficiently homogeneous in their knowledge of them or not. Variation was allowed within reason. This pre-test consisted of two compositions, which the participants were supposed to write a composition for narrative writing and a composition for the descriptive writings. Another metadiscourse test as the posttest was administered. This test also includes two compositions. In order to avoid 'practice effect' (Bachman, 1990) that could have easily built up by the participants, the teacher made a change in the sequence of the writing topics. This is intended to be the sole difference between the posttest and the pretest.

6.3. Procedures

The first step to carry out in this study was to ensure the homogeneity of the participants at the beginning of the period of research. Therefore, a version of Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT) was administered to 80 female and male learners studying English in a private institute in Tehran. Then, those participants who gained scores within one SD above and below the mean were randomly considered and zoomed in to take part in this study. After looking at their scores, forty-two participants (N = 42) were final participants of this study. The OPT used consists of 100 items as multiple-choice questions, and students find it straightforward as they were choosing the correct answers among the alternatives. The time given to complete the test was capped at 100 minutes. After assigning the qualified into one experimental group and one control group (each with 21 learners), the experimental group received the metadiscourse instruction both on narrative writing and metadiscourse instruction on descriptive writing. This type of treatment was provided in 12 sequential sessions about 30 minutes at the beginning of each session, over a period of six weeks. The same amount of time was allotted for control group except that they did not receive explicit instruction on metadiscourse markers. At the beginning of the experiment, to measure participants' initial knowledge, the described pretest was administered to all participants. At the end of the course, another parallel was administered to see whether the participants' knowledge in terms of metadiscourse markers have indeed improved after exposing them to explicit instruction or they rather received it implicitly anyway. The written essays were analyzed based on the use of metadiscourse markers. The distribution of metadiscourse markers in narrative and descriptive essays was counted. Therefore, by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the researcher concluded whether metadiscourse instruction had any effect on learners' essay writings and if yes, in which genre metadiscourse markers had a higher frequency. The methods used in this study were chiefly frequency-based and comparative and it was used in order to investigate the use of metadiscourse markers in students' essays.

6.4. Class Treatment and Data Analysis

In treatment and data analysis, this study adheres to Hyland (2005) definition of metadiscourse as "the means by which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible, and persuasive to a particular audience" (p. 39). This model is found to be effective for this study since viewing metadiscourse this way makes a text 'reader friendly'. This study

turns the focus from written text, as explained in Crismore & VandeKopple (1997, pp. 223-247) to variations in how student writers in-corporate metadiscourse into a text.

In this study, based on Hyland's model (2005), metadiscourse markers were presented in class in two forms: interactive and interactional. The interactive metadiscourse concerned the writer's awareness of involving readers and how they incorporate knowledge, interests, linguistic expectations/processing abilities. The student/writers were advised to form a text to fulfill the requirements of certain readers and consider discourse organization and not just their own experience, and then show the amount of the text created with the readers in mind.

Interactive metadiscourse markers used were transition markers (e.g. conjunctions/adverbial phrases), frame markers (to make a sequence/label/predict/shift arguments and make the discourse clearer to readers or listeners such as '*first, my purpose is, then, at the same time, to summarize, in sum, by way of introduction*'), and endorphic markers (to redirect the reader to another part of the text saliently and thus available for recovery to serve the meanings intended by the writer). After practicing these three, evidentials, and code glosses were practiced. Evidentials are metalinguistic expressions of an idea from alternative sources in order to help the readers find a command of the subject. Code glosses also provide additional data, but through paraphrase, explanation or elaboration of what has already been mentioned, to make sure the intended meaning of the writer is recoverable by the readers. They were explicit at first and turned implicit as the time and skill build up and according to the real needs of the class to give it an 'ecological' flavor.

After introducing these five, the class experienced practicing interactional metadiscourse (how writers interact by interrupting and making comments on message). Through this, the writers tried to explicitly engage the audiences by letting them respond to the text. Interactional metadiscourse practiced included the hedges, like saying '*possibly, might and perhaps*'. They are valuable because they show the writer's willingness to allow alternative voices/viewpoints. Secondly, the boosters, which do the opposite were practiced. They are words like '*obviously, clearly, and demonstrate*', which allow the writers to closedown other possibilities, when needed. Thirdly, they were asked to use attitude markers which reveal the writer's emotions/attitudes to the propositions in their writings. The teacher explained them that the attitude markers give agreement or importance, show surprise or frustration, and so on, and exemplified them with sentences beginning with '*unfortunately, hopefully, logically, remarkably,...*'. Some self-mentions markers were used to show the presence of the author inside the text, when required, using possessive adjectives and first-person pronouns '*my, our, me, mine, we, our, ours*'. Engagement markers were then explained as tools to attract the audiences or involve them as discourse participants. There are expressions such as '*dear readers, note that, as you observe*'. In sum, the definition and examples for each of these metadiscourse markers, which were used in treatment sessions, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Examples of Metadiscourse Markers practiced (based on Hyland 2005 model)

Metadiscourse categories	Metadiscourse markers	Definition	Examples
Interactive	Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition; but; thus;
	Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude;
	Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see Fig;
	Evidential	refer to information from other texts	according to X;
	Code glosses	elaborate prepositional meanings	namely; in other words
Interactional	Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; about
	Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	in fact; definitely
	Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately; surprisingly
	Self-mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
	Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see

Narrative writing group were given narration practices based on the definition by Richards and Schmidt (2002) who simplified this writing mode as a writing task that "reports an event or something that happened" (p.112). Narrative text represents events, actions, emotions, or situations the people can experience in a culture. As explained by Williams (1981), descriptive writing is practiced in class through simple topics for the description of people, places, objects, or events in writing. Whether the physical or non-physical aspects of the described, clarity of descriptions and the sufficiency of the details were emphasized. They were asked to test it out through some sensory data such as what the

writer sees, hears, smells, touches, and tastes to produce an effect on the readers. The explanations about these points were also explicit at first and turned implicit as the time and skill built up and according to the real needs of the class to give it an 'ecological' flavor.

In sum, after collecting the required data of 42 participants from proficiency test, pretest, and posttest, the researcher put the data in SPSS program. First, to ensure the normality distribution of the data set One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov was run. In addition, the possible effect of gender as the moderator variable were controlled. Finally, to investigate the means of two groups by two independent sample t-tests were administered.

7. Results

7.1. Estimating Reliability Indices of Pretest & Posttest

Before utilizing the pretest and posttest, their reliability indexes were estimated through a pilot study through KR-21. Fifteen EFL learners who shared similar characteristics with the main participants of the study were randomly selected and piloted. As shown in Table 2, the reliability of pretest and posttest of all tests has been presented.

Table 2
Reliability of the Tests in the Study

Test	Items	Index
OPT	100	KR21 (0.76)
Pretest	40	KR21 (0.81)
Posttest	40	KR21 (0.81)

To answer the research questions of the study, we first analyzed descriptive statistics of the Oxford Placement Test scores (OPT). The descriptive statistics of the OPT results was illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of the Oxford Placement Scores

	N	Min	Max.	M	SD
OPT	80	72	84	78.8	1.722
Valid N	80				

According to table 3., the mean and standard deviation of OPT scores were 78.8 and 1.722, respectively. Based on the OPT results, 42 out of 80 language learners whose score were between 73 and 71 were selected randomly. Then, the selected subjects were divided into two equal groups, i.e. one experimental and one control group. The descriptive analysis of the pretest and posttest of the first experimental group (CG) was presented in Table 4.

Table 4
The Descriptive Analysis of Results for CG

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Pretest	21	73	84	78.5	1.233
Posttest	21	72	84	78	1.705
Valid N	21				

As shown in Table 4., the pretest mean score was 78.5 and SD= 1.233. In addition, initial comparing of the pretest results with the post test score (mean=78, SD= 1.705) revealed that no significance development in terms of narrative writing development has been occurred. Overall analysis of pretest and posttest revealed that in terms of pretest narrative writing the learners expressed 93 interactional metadiscourse markers and 90 interactive metadiscourse markers (total=183). Concerning pretest descriptive writing, from among 155 metadiscourse markers, 39 interactional and 116 interactive metadiscourse markers were written by the learners. Furthermore, regarding posttest narrative writing, 133 interactional metadiscourse markers, and 91 interactive metadiscourse markers were found in the learners' writings (total=224). Finally, in the posttest descriptive writing, the learners expressed 66 interactional metadiscourse markers, and 77 interactive metadiscourse markers (total=143).

8. Discussion

As it is vital for students to learn to make writing pieces for different purposes, it can be inferred that students should be exposed to a variety of genres during reading and writing instruction in the classroom, yet in many educational contexts, students work primarily in one genre. For instance, Jacobson and Reid (2010) reported that in school settings, the narrative is the only or predominate written form presented to students through instruction. Myhill (2005) argues that student schemata for narrative text is much stronger than for non-narrative text due to the great deal of exposure they receive to this genre throughout school. In addition, Kamberelis (1999) claims that children’s literary diets are not particularly well-balanced and may not give them a chance for optimal genre development. Tunks (2010) has also maintained that limited exposure to and experience with a variety of written forms affects their writing performance.

The current study was set to investigate the effect of metadiscourse instruction on narrative writing and descriptive writing of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The findings revealed that metadiscourse instruction did have a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ narrative writing. In addition, the results indicated that the descriptive writing performance of the participants improved once they were taught via metadiscourse instruction. Furthermore, the analysis of the data revealed that after the metadiscourse instruction, in terms of narrative writings, the experimental group utilized interactional metadiscourses (e.g. hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers) more than interactive metadiscourse (e.g. transitions, endophoric markers, frame markers, evidential, and code glosses). In contrast, concerning the descriptive writing, the subjects used interactive metadiscourses more than interactional metadiscourses. As mentioned earlier, the metadiscourse instruction had a statistically significant effect on both narrative and descriptive writings. However, comparing two types of writing, the results indicated that metadiscourse instruction affected narrative writing performance more than descriptive writing performance. As shown in the Table 5, the frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers is higher in narrative writings, but in descriptive writings interactive metadiscourse markers are more used. In general, the frequency of metadiscourse markers is higher in narrative writings

Table 5

The frequency of metadiscourse markers in descriptive and narrative writings

	Descriptive		Narrative	
	post test	pre test	post test	pre test
interactive metadiscourse	6/15	7/21	6/36	7 %
interactional metadiscourse	5/27	2/42	9/30	7/24
Sum	11/43	9/63	15/26	14/25

The findings of the current study are in line with several related studies (e.g. Azizi, 2001; Simin, 2004; Simin&Tavangar, 2009; Taghizadeh&Tajabadi, 2013; Tavakoli&Amirian, 2012). Azizi (2001) found that English language learning experience of the subjects and their awareness of rhetorical preferences of the foreign language bound them to make more social markers although they are writing in English. Thus, their English learning affected their English thinking process and helped them to improve their writing. In addition, the findings are consistent with Simins’ (2004). She argued that there were important differences in metadiscourse use across various English proficiency levels. Her results revealed that proficiency level affected the use of metadiscourse; proficient learners, used metadiscourse in their writing. Students of all three proficiency groups applied both textual and social metadiscourse in their argumentative writing. Another result of this study was that there was some development in using metadiscourse during this one-term period of writing education. Therefore, she found a significant role of writing instruction on the use of metadiscourse. Furthermore, the results of the current study are in line with those of Simin and Tavangar (2009). They maintained that more proficient learners, amongst other, made more use of metadiscourse markers in their writings and perhaps the instruction of metadiscourse markers is inevitable necessity for successful writers and teaching the correct use of metadiscourse markers can come to the aid of the second language writers. Finally, the findings of this study also support studies of Cheng and Steffensen (1996) and Intraprawat and Steffensen (1995) who concluded that awareness of textual metadiscourse improves students’ writing. It should be noted here that reviewing the prior studies showed no contradictory results with the findings of the current study.

9. Conclusion

The findings of the research revealed that metadiscourse instruction did have a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ narrative writing. In addition, the results indicated that the descriptive writing

performance of the participants improved once they were taught via metadiscourse instruction. Furthermore, the analysis of the data revealed that after the metadiscourse instruction, in terms of narrative writings, the experimental group utilized interactional metadiscourses more than interactive metadiscourse. In contrast, concerning the descriptive writing, the learners used interactive metadiscourses more than interactional metadiscourses. According to Corwin (1989), an alienable feature of meta-discourse is its comprehensive evaluation of the loci and frequency of communication variables and discourse markers. Halliday (1978) and Cutting (2002) argue that an acceptable type of meta-discourse includes all the language functions as well as strategies with an equal distribution throughout a written text (article). However, in a number of instances of academic writings, there are limited types of metadiscourses, while an authentic writing should consist of metadiscourse markers equally distributed throughout the academic writings to make readers competent in their comprehension pragmatically.

10. Pedagogical implications

Pedagogically, studying metadiscourse markers in narrative and argumentative writings genres and in the EFL classroom context can have some implications for teachers, students, and decision makers, including curriculum designers and designers of nation-wide tests. In addition, the present research is of paramount importance for language teachers. It is necessary for them to be aware of the fact that writing skill may serve as influential teaching sign to help instructors in assisting learners to reach their potential in L2 academic skills. Furthermore, L2 instructors should evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the writings of their learners prior to their publishing profession academically. The final implication is directed to curriculum and syllabus designers. They should consider the results of such research in delineating the most fruitful language elements improving the students' academic written performance. Furthermore, academic article writers should be cognizant of the importance of utilizing metadiscourse markers in order to provide EFL students with necessary pragmatic knowledge.

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